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Organizational Leadership

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Kafka truly illustrates the way the environment oppresses the individual. He shows how the unconscious controls our lives.

—Manuel Puig

The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get into the office.

—Robert Frost

The vicissitudes of leadership

At its heart, leadership is about human behavior—understanding it and enhancing it. Leadership involves the highly complex interplay among individuals in systems, all within diverse situational contexts. It is about the way people and organizations behave, about creating and strengthening relationships, handling conflict, building commitment, establishing a group identity, and adapting behavior to increase effectiveness (Burns, 1978; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Stogdill & Bass, 1990; Pfeffer 1998; Kets de Vries, 2001c).

Effective leaders are receptive to the needs of followers; they are cognizant of the sensitive nature of the leader-follower relationship; they pay careful attention to group processes. Such leaders know how to calm anxieties and arouse hopes and aspirations; they know how to transform personal needs into societal demands; they know how to liberate human energy and inspire people to positive action. They are able to transcend narrow, personal concerns—their own and their followers. These leaders seek to create great places to work, and they are the people we need in our rapidly changing world.

Unfortunately, this type of leadership is still rare. Rather simplistic assumptions made about human behavior underlie most definitions of leadership, methodologies for studying leadership, and recommendations for leadership development. Evoking the rational Economic Man, whose rallying cry of “shareholder value” is far too often the major leitmotiv in organizational life, many organizational practitioners and

observers have avoided immersion into the unconscious life of organizations, and have denied its impact on business and political behavior, social dynamics, and large-group behavior (Volkan, 1988; Kets de Vries, 1980, 1984, 2006). However, a purely rational-structural way of looking at organizations has never been a sufficient framework for understanding leadership. It leaves too many organizational phenomena unresolved and unexplained. Not only is there a web of constantly shifting and irrational forces in organizations but in addition, the mismatch between “reality” and out-of-awareness reactions may lead to bewilderment, anxiety, depression or even aggression for all concerned.

Scholars and leaders who seek to understand the complexities of leader-follower interactions are not interested in idealistic, trend-driven theories of organizational analysis, transformation and change; instead, they look for *realistic* approaches. They are curious about the hidden undercurrents that affect human behavior. They realize that only by accepting the fact that leaders, like the rest of us, are not paragons of rationality can we begin to understand why many well-laid plans and strategies derail, or conversely, why great leaders sometimes come from very unexpected places.

Goaded by blatant failures of organizational leadership that were clearly the result of irrational actions—Jeffrey Skilling of Enron, Bernie Madoff, and later Rajat Gupta, the ex-managing director of McKinsey—mirrored by leaders whose actions, though quirky, were clearly beneficial to their organizations—Richard Branson of Virgin, Steve Jobs of Apple, or Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook—scholars, practitioners, and the general public now look to the systems-psychodynamic approach as an appropriate paradigm for analyzing the dark side as well as the atypical successes associated with specific leaders in diverse contexts (Levinson, 1962; Zaleznik, 1966; Zaleznik and Kets de Vries, 1975; DeBoard, 1978; Kets de Vries, 1989; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985; Hirschhorn, 1988; Czander, 1993; Obholzer and Zagier, 1994; Gabriel, 1999; Krantz, 2010; Eisold, 2010). The systemic-psychodynamic approach, which focuses precisely on the dynamics of human behavior which are often the most difficult to understand, demonstrates more effectively than other conceptual frameworks that people are complex, unique and paradoxical beings who differ in their motivational patterns.

Applying psychodynamic concepts to the ebb and flow of life in organizations contributes to our understanding of the vicissitudes of leadership. For many leaders and observers of organizational life, the only thing that matters is what we see and know (in other words, what is tangible and measurable). Consequently, organizational phenomena such as individual motivation, communication, leadership, interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, corporate culture, change, and strategy development have often been framed with behaviorist or humanist psychology models. But the “organization man” or woman is human, after all, and life in organizations has always involved more complexity than meets the eye.

The psychodynamic paradigm, when applied to leadership, draws not only on Freud’s psychoanalytic theories of human behavior, but also the work of many later scholars and thinkers in other fields who adapted and broadened the foundation concepts of psychoanalysis to encompass the hidden and overt dynamics that influence the behavior of groups and even organizations. As such, a psychodynamic approach provides valuable frameworks and concepts for studying and shaping many facets of leadership.

This chapter reviews psychodynamic issues in leadership theory, leadership in organizations, and leadership development. We begin with an overview of pertinent psychodynamic concepts. The pioneering work by scholars who brought psychodynamic insights to the attention of leadership researchers and practitioners in organizations is highlighted. In addition, we touch on some of the psychodynamic issues at play in leadership development. In concluding, we mention future issues and challenges still to be addressed.

Psychodynamic concepts: an overview

A psychodynamic approach to exploring human nature, when broadly defined, draws attention to the sources of energy and motivational forces that give impetus to, or create inertia against, human actions. This approach considers what is “within”: the inner world of individuals, including their emotions; relationships between

individuals; and in the “reality” that is created by the dynamics of groups (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999).

In the century since Freud and his contemporaries began to explore the human mind, psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories have become increasingly sophisticated, incorporating findings from domains such as dynamic psychiatry, developmental psychology, anthropology, neuropsychology, cognitive theory, family systems theory, individual and group psychotherapy, and leadership coaching. Although various aspects of Freud’s theories are no longer valid in light of new information about the workings of the mind, fundamental components of psychoanalytic theory have been scientifically and empirically tested and verified, specifically as they relate to cognitive and emotional processes (Barron et al. 1992; Westen, 1998).

As an archaeologist of the mind, Freud believed that neurotic symptoms could be used to decode why people behave the way they do. As conspicuous signifiers of a person’s inner world, they can be seen, he believed, as “the royal road to an understanding of the unconscious” (1900, p. 608). We contend that this perspective can be applied, by analogy, to organizations: just as every neurotic symptom has an explanatory history, so has every organizational act; just as symptoms and dreams can be viewed as signs replete with meaning, so can specific acts, statements, and decisions in the boardroom. Likewise, the repetition of certain phenomena in the workplace suggests the existence of specific motivational configurations. The identification of cognitive and affective distortions in an organization’s leaders and followers can help executives recognize the extent to which unconscious fantasies and out-of-awareness behavior affect decision-making and management practices in their organization. In short, the best bridge from the certainties of the empirical sciences to the ambiguities of the human mind is still (despite enormous advances in neuroscience) the clinical psychodynamic paradigm.

The conceptual framework of the clinical paradigm, with its broadly integrative psychodynamic perspective, includes several core theoretical premises which trace their lineage to Freud, but are still used today to define current psychodynamic thinking. By making sense out of executives’ deeper wishes and fantasies, and showing how these fantasies influence behavior in the world of work, the

psychodynamic orientation offers a practical way of discovering how leaders and organizations *really* function (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1984).

The inner world of leaders: out of sight, out of mind

One of the core concepts of the psychodynamic paradigm has been described as the “inner theatre” (McDougall, 1985). We all have an inner theatre filled with people who have influenced, for better or worse, our experiences in life. These early experiences contribute to the creation of response patterns that in turn result in a tendency to repeat certain behavior patterns in other contexts, with different people. Though we are generally unaware of experiencing “transference”—the term given by psychologists to this confusion in time and place—we may sometimes relate to others as we once did to early caretakers or other important figures (Freud, 1905; Etchegoyen, 1991).

The basic “script” of a person’s inner theatre is determined by the way the inner theatre evolves through developmental processes (Kets de Vries, 2006). Within the inner theatre, certain themes develop over time—themes that reflect the pre-eminence of certain inner wishes that contribute to our unique personality style. These “core conflictual relationship themes” (CCRT) translate into consistent patterns by which we relate to others (Luborsky & Crits-Cristoph, 1998). Put another way, our early experiences and basic wishes color our life-scripts, which in turn shape our relationships with others, determining the way we believe others will react to us and the way we react to others. When we go to work, we take these fundamental wishes—our core conflictual relationship themes—into the context of our workplace relationships. We project our wishes on others and, based on those wishes, rightly or wrongly anticipate how others will react to us; then we react not to their *actual* reactions but to their *perceived* reactions. Unfortunately, the life-scripts drawn up in childhood on the basis of our core conflictual relationship themes often become ineffective in adult situations.

To understand human nature in all its complexity, we must also consider motivational need systems, because they are the operational code that drives personality (Lichtenberg, 1991; Lichtenberg and Schonbar, 1992). Some of these motivational need systems are more basic than others. Most fundamental is the system

regulating a person's physiological needs—i.e., for food, water, elimination, sleep, and breathing. Another system handles the need for sensual enjoyment and (later) sexual excitement, while still another deals with the need to respond with antagonism and withdrawal to certain situations. Although these need systems impact the work situation to some extent, two others are of particular interest for life in organizations: the attachment/affiliation (Bowlby, 1969) and the exploration/assertion need systems (White, 1959; Bandura, 1989). Each of these motivational need systems is operational from infancy throughout life, modified by age, learning, and maturation. The attachment/affiliation and exploration/assertion needs systems influence the way in which individuals assert their desire to be a part of a community, and their need for creativity and new thinking. Depending on the way an organization meets these needs, connectivity and innovation can be enhanced, or on the contrary, stifled.

The concepts outlined above can be organized in a framework that describes the premises of the clinical paradigm (Kets de Vries, 2001c). First, the clinical paradigm argues that there is a rationale behind every human act—a logical explanation—even for actions that seem irrational. This point of view stipulates that all behavior has an explanation. Because that explanation is often elusive—inextricably interwoven with unconscious needs and desires—one has to do “detective work” to tease out hints and clues regarding perplexing behavior.

The second premise is that a great deal of mental life—feelings, fears, motives—lies outside of conscious awareness, but still affects conscious reality and even physical wellbeing. We all have blind spots. People aren't always aware of what they are doing—much less *why* they are doing it. Though hidden from rational thought, the human unconscious affects (and in some cases even dictates) conscious reality. Even the most “rational” people have blind spots, and even the “best” people have a shadow side—a side that they don't know, and don't *want* to know.

The third premise states that nothing is more central to who a person is than the way he or she regulates and expresses emotions. Emotions color experiences with positive and negative connotations, creating preference in the choices we make, and the way we deal with the world. Emotions also form the basis for the internalization of mental representations of the self and others that guide relationships throughout one's life. The way a person perceives and expresses emotions may change as the

years go by, influenced by life experiences (Darwin 1920; Plutchick 1980; Tomkins 1995).

The fourth premise underlying the clinical paradigm is that human development is an inter- and intrapersonal process; we are all products of our past experiences, and those experiences, including the developmental experiences given by our caretakers, continue to influence us throughout life (Piaget 1952; Erikson 1963; Emde, 1980; Kohlberg, 1981; Pine, 1985; Kagan and Moss, 1983; Kagan, 1994; Oglensky, 1995).

The clinical paradigm provides a lens for understanding our own and others' behavior. By considering the way subconscious forces and need systems interact, it is possible to gain an understanding of an individual's mental schemas—the “templates” in their unconscious—that create symbolic “scripts” in his or her “inner theater” and affect behavior. A greater awareness of problematic relationship patterns (transference and counter-transference reactions) can provide an opening to explore and work through difficult issues in the here-and-now. Exploring the relationships between past and present enables us to be liberated from ingrained, automatic behavior that may keep us locked in situations in a way that we don't always understand.

A broader stage: the interactions of leaders and followers

Mirroring and idealizing

Mirroring and idealizing are two types of transference processes that are especially common in the workplace. It is said that the first mirror for a baby is the mother's face. From that point on, the process of mirroring—that is, taking our cues about being and behaving from those around us—becomes an on-going aspect of our daily life and of our relationships with others (Kohut, 1971; 1985; Kets de Vries, 2011). In organizations, this mirroring dynamic between leader and follower can become collusive. Followers are eager to use their leaders to reflect what they would like to see. Leaders, on the other hand, find the affirmation of followers hard to resist. The result is often a mutual admiration society that encourages leaders to take actions that shore up their image rather than serve the needs of the organization. Furthermore, idealizing is a way of coping with feelings of helplessness; we idealize people

important to us, beginning with our first caretakers, assigning powerful imagery to them. Through this process, we hope to acquire some of the power of the person admired. Idealizing transference thus serves as a protective shield.

Idealizing and mirroring have their positive sides; they can generate an adhesive bond that helps to keep the organization together in crisis. Because they temporarily suspend insight and self-criticism, they are key tools in the creation of a common vision and the generation of “committed action” by followers. When these transference patterns persist, however, leader and followers gradually stop responding to the reality of the situation, allowing their past hopes and fantasies govern their interactions.

Narcissism

At the heart of leadership lies the subject of narcissism (Freud, 1914; Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971, 1985; Maccoby, 1976; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985; Kets de Vries, 1989). Narcissism—which Freud (1914) summarized as behaviors that range from a normal self-interest to a pathological self-absorption—offers leaders the conviction about the righteousness of their cause, which inspires loyalty and group identification; the strength (and even inflexibility) of a narcissistic leader’s worldview gives followers something to identify with and hold on to. Although it can be a key ingredient for success, narcissism can also become a toxic drug.

Narcissism can be labelled as either constructive or reactive, with *excess* narcissism generally falling in the latter category and healthy narcissism generally falling in the former (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985, Kets de Vries, 2004). Constructive narcissists have been fortunate enough to have caretakers who provided a supportive environment that led to basic trust and to a sense of control over one’s actions. As adults, they tended to be relatively well balanced; to have vitality and sense of self-esteem, capacity for introspection, and empathy. In leadership roles, constructive narcissists often seem larger than life. They would inspire others not only to be better at what they do, but also to entirely change what they do.

Reactive narcissistic leaders, on the other hand, were not as fortunate in childhood. Instead, they were the recipients of over- or under-stimulation, or

inconsistent stimulation. Typically, reactive narcissistic leaders become fixated on issues of power, status, prestige, and superiority. They are often driven toward achievement and attainment by the need to get even for perceived slights experienced in childhood. They are especially responsive to admiration and are not prepared to share power. Unwilling to tolerate disagreement, and dealing poorly with criticism, such leaders rarely consult with others and when they do, such consultation is little more than ritualistic. The result is that disposition and position work together to wreak havoc on reality testing and the boundaries that define normal work processes disappear.

Identification with the aggressor

To overcome the anxiety prompted by a leader's aggressive behavior, some followers may resort to the defensive process known as "identification with the aggressor." In the presence of a superior force with the power to inflict mental and physical pain, people sometimes feel a strong incentive to become like that superior force, to protect against possible aggression (Freud, 1966; Kets de Vries, 2009). In full-fledged identification with the aggressor, individuals impersonate the aggressor, transforming themselves from those threatened to those making threats.

In this climate of dependency, the world becomes starkly black and white. In other words, the leader sees people as being either for or against him or her. When a leader has this kind of mind-set, independent thinkers are "removed"; those who hesitate to collaborate become fresh targets for the leader's anger. Those "identifying with the aggressor" support the leader almost as a rite of passage and, coincidentally, share his or her eventual guilt about actions taken—a guilt that can be exculpated through scapegoats, designated villains on whom the group enacts revenge whenever things go wrong. These scapegoats become the external stabilizers of identity and inner control on which to project everything the group is afraid of, everything that is perceived as bad.

Folie à deux

Some leader-follower collusions can be described as "folie à deux," or shared madness, a form of mental contagion (Kets de Vries, 1979, 2001b). In such

collusions, there is usually a dominant person whose delusions become incorporated and shared by the other, healthier members of the organization. Leaders whose capacity for reality testing has become impaired may transfer their delusions to their subordinates, who in turn often engage in mental acrobatics to stay close to the center of power. To minimize conflict and disagreement, they sacrifice truth on the altar of intimacy, maintaining a connection with the leader even though he or she has lost touch with reality.

Collusive relationships like these, with their induced lack of reality testing, can have various outcomes—all negative. In extreme cases, a folie á deux can lead to the self-destruction of the leader, professionally speaking, and the demise of the organization. And the implications of the dark sides of leadership and “followership” are clear. The world is full of followers who deprive their leaders of needed critical feedback for the purpose of self-enhancement. A follower’s shadow side can be just as dark, and have as devastating an effect, as a leader’s. No leader is immune from taking actions leading to destructive consequences, and no follower from being an active participant in the process.

The shadow side of groups

A study of leader-follower relationships necessarily addresses the psychology of groups. The psychiatrist Wilfred Bion (1959) identified three basic assumptions in groups—dependency, fight-flight, and pairing—that may result in pathological regressive processes, deflecting people from the principal tasks to be performed (Bion 1959).

People often assume, at an unconscious level, that the leader or organization can and should offer protection and guidance similar to that offered by parents in earlier years. Groups subject to the *dependency assumption* are united by feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, neediness, and fear of the outside world. They perceive the leader as omnipotent, and as a result, they readily give up their autonomy. This contributes to goal-directedness and cohesiveness, but impairs followers’ critical judgment and leaves them unwilling to take initiative.

Another common unconscious assumption is that the organizational world is dangerous and participants must use fight or flight as defense. In groups subject to the *fight-flight assumption*, there is a tendency to split the world into camps of friends and enemies. Fight reactions manifest themselves in aggression against the self, peers or authority. Flight reactions include avoidance, absenteeism, and resignation. Subscribing to a rigid, bipolar view of the world, these groups possess a strong desire for protection from and conquest of “the enemy,” in all its varied manifestations. Some leaders encourage the fight-flight assumption, inflaming their followers against real and/or imagined enemies, using the in-group/out-group division to motivate people and to channel anxiety outward. This enforces the group’s identity and creates meaning for followers who feel lost. The resulting sense of unity is highly reassuring but makes the group increasingly dependent on their leader.

Bion’s third assumption is that pairing up with a person or sub-group perceived as powerful will help a person cope with anxiety, alienation, and loneliness. People experiencing the *pairing assumption* fantasize that the most effective creation will take place in pairs. Unfortunately, pairing also implies splitting, which may result in intra- and inter-group conflict and building of smaller systems within the group. It also manifests itself in ganging up against the leader perceived as aggressor or authority figure.

Basic social defenses

The basic assumptions concerning group dynamics discussed above all reveal underlying anxiety about the world and one’s place in it. When they prevail in an organization, it is a sign that the leadership is not dealing adequately with the emerging anxiety of working in a social setting (Menzies Lyth, 1959; Jaques, 1955; Gilmore and Krantz, 1985; Hirschhorn, 1988; Diamond, 1993; Gould, Stapley and Stein, 2001; Kets de Vries, 2011). Typically, executives rely on existing structures to “contain” that anxiety. When these offer insufficient “containment,” people in organizations engage in regressive social defenses such as splitting (seeing everything as black or white); projection (seeing one’s own short-comings in others); displacement (expressing negative emotions by focusing on a less threatening target); denial (refusal to accept facts), and other defensive routines. Dysfunctional structures may be put into place to cope with depressive and paranoid anxiety.

The purpose of social defenses is to transform and neutralize strong tensions and affects such as anxiety, shame, guilt, envy, jealousy, rage, sexual frustration, and low self-esteem. They function similarly to individual defences, but are woven into the fabric of an organization in an effort to assure safety and acceptance. When these ways of dealing with the angst and unpredictability of life in organizations become the dominant mode of operation (rather than an occasional stopgap measure), they become dysfunctional for the organization as a whole. They may still serve a purpose (albeit not necessarily a constructive one), but they have become bureaucratic obstacles. These bureaucratic routines and pseudo-rational activities gradually obscure personal and organizational realities, allowing people to detach themselves from their inner experience. Task forces, administrative procedures, rationalization, intellectualization, and other structures and processes are used to keep people emotionally uninvolved and to help them feel safe and in control. While these processes do in fact reduce anxiety—the original goal—they also replace creativity, empathy, awareness, openness to change and meaning with control and impersonality.

Bringing the human dimension back into organizations

Freud himself didn't make any direct observations about the application of his ideas to the world of work, but later in life he became interested in group psychology and societal issues, notably in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). His writing, including an exchange of letters with Einstein on the topic of war (published in 1933 as a pamphlet entitled *Why War?*), did not have an immediate impact—both Einstein and Freud were soon driven into exile—but the psychoanalytic paradigm was taken up by many of his contemporaries and became a critical element of subsequent analyses of modern society, and set the stage for a wider application of psychodynamic theory to organizations. Subsequently, many scholars influenced by Freud's contributions applied aspects of the clinical paradigm to the workplace. These scholars claimed that the inner world of the leader—his or her early childhood experiences, and related hopes, fears and desires—was extremely influential even at a systemic level in organizations, and should not be ignored.

In the aftermath of World War II, psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically-informed researchers at the London Tavistock Institute and the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas; Abraham Zaleznik at the Harvard Business School; and Otto Kernberg at the Cornell Medical School were among the first to argue that applying psychoanalytic concepts to organizational life could help people better understand the irrational processes that underlie human behavior and decision-making. Their contemporaries in Germany and France were also beginning to apply psychodynamic concepts to society and organizations.

London-based Tavistock was founded in 1946 by a group that included well-known psychoanalysts such as Elliott Jaques, Wilfred Bion, John Bowlby, Eric Trist, Melanie Klein, and R. D. Laing. Elaborating on Bion's earlier focus on the properties and unconscious functioning of the group as a whole, rather than as an aggregate of individuals (Bion and Rickman, 1943; Bion, 1961), the Tavistock group went on to contribute a great deal to our understanding of the hidden dynamics within organizations that may directly influence leadership, including for example, the concepts of: socio-technical systems (Trist & Bamforth, 1951; Emery & Trist, 1965); industrial democracy (Jaques, 1951); the use of social systems as a defense against anxiety (Jaques, 1955, 1970; Menzies Lyth, 1959); the interpretation of social dreaming as a way to define meaning for a group (Lawrence, 1998); and organizational role analysis (Newton, Long & Sievers, 2006). However, members of the Tavistock Institute focused on group processes in public organizations such as hospitals and schools, and did not work within business organizations, with the notable exception of Elliot Jaques and his partnership with businessman Wilfred Brown. Jaques and Brown conducted a 17-year study, "the Glacier project," that explored issues of authority, role clarity, accountability and power, seeking to understand the motives of both leaders and workers in a Scottish factory, Glacier Metal, of which Brown was the CEO. Jaques' early findings were published in his seminal book *The Changing Culture of a Factory* (1951).

The Menninger Clinic, founded in 1942 to promote the training of psychoanalysts, also began to apply a psychodynamic approach to the world of work in the mid-1950s, notably through the work of Will Menninger and Harry Levinson with the Menninger Division of Industrial Mental Health. Interest in the world of work was

sparked there by an extensive national survey of mental health problems in industry, including recommendations on how to solve or alleviate them. As a result of the survey, Menninger began to offer weeklong seminars for executives from all parts of the country in order to give these business leaders an understanding of why human beings act as they do.

In Germany, psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich applied some of the principles of psychoanalysis to post-war society, and his books *Society without the Father* (1963) and *The Inability to Mourn* (1975) became extremely influential works that not only shaped Germany's analyses of the causes of their war, but also opened the field of social psychology to a much broader audience. In France, a socio-psychoanalytic movement emerged that included scholars such as Gérard Mendel (1968), Didier Anzieu (1972, 1999), René Kaës (1993), Eugène Enriquez (1992), Gilles Amado and Leopold Vansina (2005); and Jean Benjamin Stora (2007). These psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically-informed scholars used psychoanalytic conceptualizations to better understand the fantasies, projections, and identifications that play themselves out in groups, as well as the processes of repression, suppression, and idealization that are important in organizational life.

At the same time, Abraham Zaleznik (while in training as a psychoanalyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute), started to influence a group of young scholars, including Manfred Kets de Vries, Sudhir Kakar, Pierre Laurin, Anne Jardim, Roland Reitter, Georges Trepo, and Michael Hofmann, who were interested in both the world of work and the world of psychoanalysis. Kets de Vries later went to Montreal to teach at McGill University, and to start his own training as a psychoanalyst. Kets de Vries influenced many scholars in Canada, including Laurent Lapierre, Alain Noel, and Danny Miller.

The early work of this diverse group of scholars provided the stimulus for the first International Symposium on Applied Psychoanalysis and Organizations in 1980, organized by Michael Hofmann of the *Wirtschaftsuniversität* of Vienna (in collaboration with the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society). A further impetus came from Leopold Gruenfeld, who organized a number of conferences under the auspices of Cornell University. Eventually, in 1983, these various symposia led to the founding of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations (ISPSO); by

the early 2000s, ISPSO had a worldwide reach. The vision of ISPSO is to provide “a forum for academics, clinicians, consultants and others interested in working in and with organizations utilizing psychoanalytic concepts and insights” (www.ispso.org).

People working at the interface of psychoanalysis and organizations placed a high value on addressing practical problems and opportunities in social systems from a simultaneous or sequentially deep (psychodynamic) and broad (organizational theory) perspective. For example, Levinson proposed the concept of a “psychological contract” between leaders and followers, arguing in *Men, Management and Mental Health* (1962) that if management did not pay attention to the conscious and subconscious needs of their employees, organizational performance would be adversely affected. Levinson’s seminal book *Organizational Diagnosis* outlined a new, clinical contribution to the diagnosis of systemic organizational problems (1972). Zaleznik argued (1989) that business people focused too much on process and structure, and not enough on ideas and emotions, and suggested that leaders should relate to followers in more empathetic and intuitive ways. To emphasize this point, in *Power and the Corporate Mind*, Zaleznik and Kets de Vries (1975) applied concepts from psychoanalysis, political science, and management theory, to examine the effect that the conscious and unconscious motivations of the chief executive has upon his or her organization. In *The Neurotic Organization*, Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) integrated psychiatric and psychological findings and insights with organizational behaviour theories to create a new framework for analysis of organizations, proposing that the neuroses of a top leader can be recreated throughout the organization.

Larry Hirschhorn (1988) used the term “applied clinical practice” to describe organizational consulting interventions that included diagnostic methods and actions based on a clinical, applied approach: exploring the organization systemically, and drawing on personality theory and group and organizational processes. Hirschhorn’s seminal work *The Workplace Within: Psychodynamics of Organizational Life* (1988) opened the door to a better understanding of the irrational and emotional character of organizations, and how to create healthier organizational cultures. Hirschhorn proposed a systemic, psychodynamic model of work that entailed working with real clients on practical outcomes, by addressing the hidden, and unconscious mechanisms underlying patterns of organizational behavior.

Neumann and Hirschhorn (in a special issue of *Human Relations*) referred to the difficulties of integrating psychodynamic theory and organizational theory (1999). It was a challenging task, they wrote, because of the “limited degree to which those working with psychodynamic theories have managed to also relate to organizational theories, and vice versa” (1999, p. 683). A too narrowly focused psychodynamic approach could limit the scope of interventions to the unconscious motivation of individuals and groups. Conversely, a broader organizational theory perspective that focuses on large systems or environments might overlook major sources of motivation and energy that are perceptible at the organizational level, but influential at the individual level. However, they argued, integrating psychodynamic and organizational theory would promote better analyses of the “motivational forces in individuals, groups and their leaders in the context of structures and processes within major subsystems, organizations, and their environments—and vice versa” (1999, p. 685).

Integrating leadership theories and the psychodynamic paradigm

Despite a growing interest in applying psychodynamic concepts to the study of organizations, most attempts to conceptualize leadership—trait or “Great Man” theory (e.g., Stogdill, 1948); contingency theory (e.g., Fielder, 1964; Vroom & Yetten, 1973); and leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (e.g., Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982; Pierce & Newstrom, 2000; Bass & Bass, 2008)—did not directly address subconscious forces in human behavior. However, transformational and charismatic leadership theories (e.g. House, 1977; Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, Deluga, 1988; Podsakoff, et al, 1990; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), began to challenge the field of leadership studies with the question of how the interplay between a leader and followers—for example, their mutual needs, beliefs, and values—affects the follower’s deep engagement in the interests of the leader’s vision. In addressing these issues, insights and methodologies drawn from a psychodynamic approach became increasingly relevant. The importance of emotions, the significance of earlier life experiences, and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships were themes that scholars took up and applied to new theories of leadership.

To develop the conceptual links between leadership and follower attitudes, behaviors, and performance outcomes, Avolio et al (2004) proposed a theoretical framework that outlined the processes by which leaders exert influence over followers. They looked at the ways leadership is linked to followers' attitudes and behaviors, and the ways in which the intervening variables such as hope, trust, positive emotions, and optimism could be enhanced. Authentic leadership, as they described it, is positively related to followers' personal identification with the leader, and their social identification with the organization. This identification is created through leadership behaviors that allow followers to see their personal self-concepts and objectives reflected in the goals of their organization. The psychoanalytic concept of "projective identification"—a psychological mechanism of transferring to someone else, one's own unwanted, or desired, ideas or impulses—describes the process by which an individual projects his own ideal self onto someone he admires. A leader emerges when a group of followers projects their self-ideal to the same admired person and a "group-ego ideal" comes into being (Freud, 1921; Ogden, 1977; Schwartz, 1990; Kets de Vries, 2011b).

Followers' identification with the leader also helps leaders to play a role in instilling hope in followers—and this reflects the notion of followers' agency (goal-directed energy), and the determination and belief that goals can be planned for and attained (Snyder, 2000). Research evidence confirms that trust in leadership is related to positive organizational outcomes (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) and positive follower performance and attitudes, such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Butler et al, 1999; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Followers who believe in their leaders' abilities, integrity and benevolence are more willing to engage in risk-taking behaviors (Mayer et al, 1995). Leaders establish a foundation for trust and intimacy with followers by transparently displaying their own capacities, values, hopes and weaknesses to followers, and allowing or even encouraging the followers to express themselves equally (Avolio et al, 2004).

It has also been well-established that emotional attachment between leaders and followers is a key factor in successful leadership (Bass, 1985; Gardner and Avolio, 1998), and that, perhaps not surprisingly, transformational leadership behaviors are associated with higher levels of emotional intelligence (George, 2000), which in the

context of leadership has been described as “the ability to effectively join emotions and reasoning, using emotions to facilitate reasoning, and reasoning intelligently about emotions” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) concluded that management of organizational culture is, in fact, management of emotions.

Avolio and his co-authors proposed that “followers’ positive emotions are positively related to followers’ optimism; and optimism mediates the relationship between followers’ positive emotions and followers’ positive attitudes, which in turn influences followers’ behaviors” (2004, p. 814). If we accept this proposal, then it becomes evident that one of the psychodynamically-informed leader’s key tasks is to build and maintain followers’ self-confidence, hopefulness, optimism, and resilience (Gardner and Schermerhorn, 2004), by drawing on his or her own capacity for emotional intelligence (George, 2003).

The continual fine-tuning of self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling on the part of leaders allows them to shape the behavior of followers, resulting in followers’ successful and sustainable performance (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Gardner and Schermerhorn (2004) made a link between leadership authenticity and Bandura’s (2000) four sources of follower self-efficacy (successful experiences; vicarious learning; coaching and encouragement; and managing physiological states and emotional threat of failure); they propose that “authentic leaders persuade others to recognize their capabilities and provide them with important cognitive, emotional and moral support that facilitates further development” (Gardner and Schermerhorn, 2004, p. 274.)

A psychodynamic approach to leadership development

As it became apparent that the hidden dynamics of individual leaders and groups could influence organizational outcomes, the issue of how to develop leaders also became more topical. Technical training was important, but “soft” skills were also necessary, and in many cases, arguably even harder to learn. Organizational leaders themselves realized this, and sought to include human issues in strategic planning. In

answer, by the early 2000s most leadership development interventions, whether in business schools or in companies, began to include experiential opportunities for participants to revisit their past experiences and reshape their future goals, on individual, group, and / or systemic levels (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007, 2011). “Know thyself” became the leader’s mantra, as leadership scholars brought psychodynamic methods of leadership development—including peer group work, psychodynamically-oriented 360-degree questionnaires (e.g. Kets de Vries et al, 2004, 2006, 2010), executive coaching, and personal narratives—into the classroom (e.g. Snook, Nohria, & Khurana, 2011).

While laying out the framework and models of leadership, scholars called in parallel for a better understanding of how leadership can be taught (Avolio et al., 2004). Here again, the psychodynamic approach provides rich veins of knowledge about the nature of authority, the processes of followership, and the reverberation of emotions within organizations. Taking the stance of exploring from within, Luthans and Avolio (2003) proposed that a leader’s personal history, including family and cultural background and early life experiences; and trigger events, such as difficult challenges, are potential antecedents to leadership capabilities. Stating that it appeared that life itself is the most authentic leadership development process, Avolio and his coauthors made a request for further research into how to improve on “life’s program of leadership development, making it more efficient, cost effective, and less risky” (2004, p. 816.) Ibarra and her coauthors (2010) proposed that a fruitful future avenue for understanding of leadership development would be an exploration of the identity change required to prepare an individual for an active leadership role. Recently literature on human resource management, leadership development, and executive education has started to incorporate the psychodynamic concepts of human development into the process of managerial learning and growth (Cerdin & Dubouloy, 2004; Dubouloy, 2004; Korotov, 2005; Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010; Petriglieri, Wood, & Petriglieri, 2011).

Leadership development is a process that can and should take place continually, and within the workplace or in other locations (Fulmer, 1997). Recognizing a need to identify a more structured approach, Day (2000) suggested that the primary emphasis in leadership development should be on building and using interpersonal competence,

and taking a combined approach of individualistic, shared, and relational experiences; that is, a focus on the individual in a holistic and systemic context. To be effective, Day advised, leadership development should help people move to a higher level of both *differentiation*, that is, understanding ways in which the individual leader is unique and different from others, as well as *integration*, which implies the ways in which the leader applies self-knowledge in order to better relate to others, build commitment and extend social networks. Day (2000) identified practices that could be applied to improving or understanding leadership development in the context of work. These practices included 360° feedback surveys, coaching and mentoring, network-building, challenging job assignments, and “action-learning” projects that incorporate a degree of training and learning.

Chang and Diddams (2008) also warned that leaders must be aware of the human tendency to self-deception, and should be capable of dealing with “self-insight flaws.” Chang and Diddams thus introduced humility as a key concept in leadership, which they argue implies an openness to concede imperfections that is not contingent with humiliation or loss of self-esteem, but rather, indicates an orientation towards others and away from self-preoccupation. In other words, they warned against delimiting leadership with exclusively positive characteristics.

Following his earlier work on the psychodynamic approach to the study of leaders in organizations, Kets de Vries (2005) argued that to be more effective in developing reflective leaders, leadership development programs should integrate a clinical orientation, because this paradigm provides a solid framework for designing executive programs in which participants learn to become “organizational detectives,” uncovering the non-rational patterns—the intrapsychic and interpersonal undercurrents—that influence the behavior of individuals (themselves and others), dyads, and groups. As he wrote in *Sex, Money, Happiness and Death* (2009b), there are mega-issues with which many leaders struggle. One of the objectives of the psychodynamically-oriented leadership development program is to create an educational opportunity for participants that provokes, among other things, an exploration of hidden or unconscious rationale—often related in some way to sexuality, financial issues, a search for happiness and meaning, or fears of mortality—for what may appear to be irrational career choices and leadership decisions.

In clinically-oriented leadership development programs, group dynamic effects, such as social reciprocity, peer pressure, and network contagion are harnessed—and analyzed by participants themselves—through peer group coaching structures to help participants uncover blind spots, identify behavior for change, and experiment with new behavior in their workplace that will help them advance in their career trajectory and future goals (Dubouloy, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2011a, 2011b; Kets de Vries and Korotov, 2011).

In these programs, participants are encouraged by faculty and peers to experiment with transcendence of the self (Summers, 2000), shaped by task, social and emotional feedback. Mirvis (2008) suggested that executive programs may be, under some circumstances, a “consciousness raising” experience which cultivates participants’ self-awareness, deepens their understanding of others, and helps them to relate to society. Some of these programs may even be described by the participants themselves as what Bennis and Thomas called “a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or altered sense of identity” (Bennis and Thomas, 2002; Cooper et al, 2005; Kets de Vries and Korotov; 2007; Florent-Treacy, 2009).

Any leadership development program that seeks to help participants develop “self-concept clarity” (Shamir and Eilam, 2005), will have to acknowledge and work with the fact that for most people, this is a terribly difficult, if not simply terrifying, leap into the unknown. One of the most powerful and effective experiences in leadership programs is creating the cognitive and emotional tipping points that will help participants to see the discrepancies in their lives, and the valence of their own individual change process and goals.

The framework of this type of program can be seen as an adaptation of traditional psychodynamic group therapy methods to the business school classroom (Florent-Treacy, 2009). Indeed, in some programs in which leadership development is a key objective, a critical success factor is the ability to create a safe transitional space (Winnecott, 1951; Carson, 1997; Korotov, 2005) in which a somewhat adapted form of what has been called “corrective emotional moments,” (Alexander & French, 1946; Jacobs, 1990; Yalom, 2005), drives behavioral change. Although in psychotherapy literature the concept of corrective emotional moments has been in and out of fashion over the years (Knight, 2004), the theory helps to describe and understand the tipping

points that push participants to make a connection between their current choices in life, and their past experiences. In this case, group psychotherapy practice has been adapted to the classroom in that the “corrective” element, and support for sense-making, is provided not by a therapist, but by fellow participants and faculty members (Korotov, 2005).

Organizational coaching and consultation

Organizational diagnosis and intervention to foster individual and system-wide change is part and parcel of life in organizations. Unfortunately, many people dedicated to change—change agents, consultants and coaches, for example—are inclined to focus on the symptoms and not on the underlying causes. Following a philosophy that what cannot be directly seen doesn’t really exist, they resort to oversimplified quick fixes in trying to institute change (Levinson, 2002). A behavioral modification program may have a positive effect, to be sure—but that effect will not last long. The expertise provided by traditional management consultants and coaches can often be valuable in the right context, but could end up being costly or even harmful if the organizational problems arise from interpersonal communication, group processes, social defenses, uneven leadership, and organization-wide neurosis. Here, a more appropriate intervention would be clinically-informed and systemic, focusing on the levers that drive individual and organizational change.

Executive coaches and consultants who are aware of the hidden undercurrents know how to help bring about the necessary relinquishment of defenses, encourage the expression of emotions in a situation-appropriate manner, and cultivate a perception of self and others that is in accord with reality (McCullough Vaillant, 1997; Kets de Vries, 2006). In addition, they consider their own emotional reactions to people in the organization as an important source of data (Kets de Vries, et al, 2007, 2010; Korotov et al, 2011; Sandler, 2011). What differentiates these consultants from their more traditional counterparts is their skill at using transference and counter-transference manifestations as a basic experiential and diagnostic tool; their understanding of organizational defense mechanisms, and their ability to decipher unconscious thoughts and feelings (Diamond & Allcorn, 2003). The ever-present

“triangle of relationships”—comprised of the person being interviewed, some significant past “other” from that person’s life, and the change agent/ consultant/ coach—provides a conceptual structure for assessing and pointing out patterns of responses that link past and present relationships. Thus, self-awareness is one of the most valuable tools used by a clinically informed consultant and coach (Kets de Vries, 2002; Brunning, 2006).

A clinically-informed coach also recognizes the importance of projective identification. A psychological defense against unwanted feelings or fantasies, projective identification is a mode of communication as well as a type of interpersonal relationship (Ogden 1977). For example, if executives in a department deny or reject an uncomfortable experience by imagining that it belongs to another group of executives, that group—the recipients of the projection—are subtly inducted to think, feel, and act in congruence with the projection received from the first group.

By paying attention to behavioural patterns that may have their origin in their clients’ earlier life experiences, clinically-informed consultants and coaches look for thematic unity (Kets de Vries, 2011a). They then employ pattern matching, looking for structural parallels within multi-layered relationships and between current events and earlier incidents. They know that any aspect of the organizational “script” can have more than one meaning and can be viewed from different perspectives. Creating meaning at multiple levels helps the consultants and coaches determine the individual and organizational roots and consequences of actions and decisions. When the link between present and distant past relationships is made meaningful to people at all levels of the organization, the process of large-scale change is more likely to be successful.

Since the aim of a clinical intervention is not just symptom suppression—not merely a “flight into health”—but durable, sustainable change, clinical consultants must always be attentive to hidden agendas and the presence of complex psychological resistances. Identifying and addressing the organization’s core psychological concerns quickly is important for a successful intervention. By addressing these issues—by making conscious what had been unconscious and then working to address behavior patterns determined to be dysfunctional—the consultant

and the organization's leadership together can disable prevailing social defenses and heal organizational neurosis.

Finally, clinically-informed consultants and coaches strive to instill in the organization's leaders an interest in and understanding of their own behavior. Ideally, those leaders will eventually internalize the ability to learn and work in the psychological realm, allowing them to address future issues without the help of a consultant.

Psychodynamic issues in leadership: future challenges and trends

One of the challenges of the psychodynamic approach to leadership is the appropriateness of research methodologies used and their acceptance by "traditional" streams in leadership research. Leadership studies are often faulted for causality problems, thus making it difficult to prove how leadership impacts outcomes for a social group or organization (Bass & Bass, 2008). Psychodynamic leadership research theories sometimes meet resistance given the emphasis on interpretive methods. However, Prins (2006) suggested that the subjective experiences of the researcher within the psychodynamic paradigm can be in fact used productively as additional data. Loch (2010) outlined an interesting framework connecting the psychodynamic approach with the management science paradigm. Loch (2010) argued that bringing together the systems view, where roles are important for understanding of managerial phenomena, with a psychodynamic perspective which seeks an integrated understanding of manager's motivation, could help overcome the limitations of both approaches in figuring out what actually takes place in the world of modern organizations. Perhaps it is still best to consider the psychodynamic approach as a perspective for looking at social systems that encapsulates an evolving body of knowledge, and as a method of inquiry that lends itself specifically to interventions for action and change (Vansina & Vansina-Cobaret, 2008).

Although a psychodynamic approach to the study and practice of leadership is valued by many as an essential tool for understanding the hidden but influential emotional life of organizations, difficult issues remain. With reason, many scholars

and practitioners fear the danger of going too far, crossing boundaries into realms that are more safely explored with the guidance of a therapist. Leadership coaching, for example, is an area that is still unregulated and attracts practitioners with widely varying levels of experience (Korotov et al, 2011). Another issue is the widespread belief that exploring hidden undercurrents takes time that would be better spent on activities that affect the organization's bottom line in a more quantifiable way. Furthermore, many organization leaders believe that permitting a developmental coaching culture in their company—in other words, directly addressing psychodynamic issues in leadership—might open a Pandora's box of complaints that would distract human resources from more urgent problems. In addition, systems-psychodynamic organizational interventions, despite a 50-year developmental history, are still notoriously complex and difficult to design and carry out effectively. Finally, a heavy-handed psychodynamic approach to leadership development may be met with strong resistance in certain national cultures or industries, where insistence on “trust,” “openness,” and a focus on the individual are still considered to be inappropriate.

Despite these challenges and concerns, an increasing number of practitioners and scholars have come to realize that the use of psychodynamic concepts can provide greater insight into the vexing problems concerning individuals, groups, and organizational systems. A burgeoning interest in related topics such as leadership, corporate culture, family business, organizational stress, career dynamics, leadership coaching, group behavior, and organizational change and transformation has focused attention on the systems-psychodynamic point of view (DeBoard, 1978; Kets de Vries, 1984, 1991, 2011; Kets de Vries and Miller, 1984; Gilmore & Krantz, 1985; Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994; Czander, 1993; Gabriel, 1999; Gould, Stapley, & Stein, 2001; Huffington et al, 2004; Eisold, 2010; Diamond, 1993; Diamond and Allcorn, 2009; Amado and Vansina, 2005; Kets de Vries, Carlock and Florent-Treacy, 2007; Krantz, 2010).

By remaining close the fundamental argument that there is more to human behavior than meets the eye, scholars of leadership and organization have been able to use a psychodynamic lens to explore, for example, the internal, motivational drivers that influence leaders' decision making; the psychological factors that hamper or encourage leadership; and the corollary, transactional relationships between leaders

and followers. The psychodynamic approach has also been proven over time to be an effective way to explore leadership roles that are critical but often difficult to define or measure, for example, sense-maker, purveyor of hope, and container of anxieties (Kets de Vries, 2011). Indeed, one of the strengths of the psychodynamic approach is its fundamental universality—it addresses issues that are found in organizations large and small, around the world.

Final reflections

Vast numbers of organizations around the world complain that there is a dissonance between what their leaders say and what they do. This will remain a truism, if those leaders are not able to reflect on their own behavior and that of their followers. It is ironic that, while people see value in learning new skills, they rarely see value in looking at the ingrained character patterns they bring to the use of those skills. Yet it is those very patterns that dictate their behavior and their decisions. As long as such patterns are unconscious, leaders will struggle to align espoused theory with practice.

Responsible leadership requires a solid dose of emotional intelligence and the increased personal responsibility and effectiveness that comes with it. Unfortunately—as we have indicated—unearthing mental and emotional patterns that dictate behavior can be both uncomfortable and disorienting. Therefore professional expertise and support can be helpful in uncovering psychological drivers and making that personal shift necessary to improve emotional intelligence. For their part, leaders need to accept that this kind of intervention takes time, but that any time applied to improve their emotional intelligence will be well spent. Such activity is done not just for personal gratification (though it *is* personally rewarding), but also for the good of the organization and its people. This approach will contribute to better places to work.

Organizations that are best places to work are what we like to call “authentizotic,” a label that melds the Greek words *authentikos* (authentic) and *zoteikos* (vital to life). *Authenticity* implies that the organization has a compelling connective quality for its employees in its vision, mission, culture, and structure. In such organizations,

its leadership has communicated clearly and convincingly not only the *how* of work but also the *why*. They walk the talk—they set the example. The *zoteekos* (vital to life) element contributes to a sense of personal wholeness, making people feel complete and alive. *Zoteekos* allows for self-assertion in the workplace creating a sense of effectiveness and competency, of autonomy, of initiative, creativity, entrepreneurship, and industry (Kets de Vries, 2001a).

The challenge for twenty-first-century leadership is to create organizations that possess these qualities. Authentizotic organizations are easily recognized: employees maintain a healthy balance between personal and organizational life; employees are offered—and gladly take—time for self-examination, they constantly question themselves and others about individual and corporate actions and decisions. Authentizotic organizations equip their people to think. With these impressive characteristics, authentizotic organizations will be the winners in tomorrow’s marketplace, able to deal with the continuous and discontinuous change that the new global economy demands. To create such organizations, the systemic-psychodynamic lens helps to engage in more realistic, enduring interventions. To quote the writer Anais Nin, “Our life is composed greatly from dreams, from the unconscious, and they must be brought into connection with action. They must be woven together.”

It is now evident that psychodynamic issues in leadership include not only the lived, human experience of leaders in organizations, but also are to be found in the way scholars and practitioners describe, measure, and intervene in that experience. The psychodynamic lens provides new insights not only on how people become leaders, but also how they interact with followers, and how their individual psychodynamic history can influence the equilibrium of organizational systems. As such, when wielded properly, a psychodynamic approach is a powerful tool. But it can be a two-edged sword. As a willingness to look “within” becomes a mainstream, desirable leadership capability, the risk is that the same dangers that were originally identified in psychoanalysis may resurface. It has become all too common for leaders, scholars and consultants to indulge in “wild analysis,” proposing interpretations or interventions that are not bounded by protocols for confidentiality and safety (Zaleznik, 2007). Executive coaching, for example, remains a relatively unregulated profession, in which irresponsible coaches, dabbling in a psychodynamic approach to

leadership issues, have the potential to do great harm (Berglas, 2002). In leadership development, experiential programs in business schools created powerful learning opportunities for leaders who need to take the time out to reflect. At the same time, equal attention must still be paid in these programs to skill-building and technical expertise. Otherwise, a psychodynamic sensitivity to the vicissitudes of organizational life may eventually fall out of favor as a valid leadership competency. Similarly, although psychodynamic issues arise from human experience and are therefore universal, not all cultures or worldviews are equal in the way these issues are addressed. In the final analysis, therefore, it is essential to be aware of the psychodynamic undercurrents inherent in leadership, but above all, do no harm.

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